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Pacific West Region News Release


For Immediate Release
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October 8, 2002

POINT REYES NATIONAL SEASHORE HONORED WITH PRESTIGIOUS ENVIRONMENTAL AWARD

Scientists and educators from Point Reyes National Seashore will be honored at an awards ceremony in Washington, D.C. on October 17, for their creative approach to developing a laboratory and learning center at Point Reyes National Seashore in Marin County, California, it was announced today by National Park Service (NPS) Regional Director Jonathan B. Jarvis. Senior Department of Interior officials will be presenting the Environmental Achievement Award. This award is being presented to only fourteen groups nationwide.

The Pacific Coast Learning Center, open since 2000 and sheltered in spectacular Olema Valley, provides office space, housing, computer access to the park geographic information system, and other critical needs for researchers and future scientists. The objective of the center is to work with partners such as universities and agencies to conduct essential research on cultural and natural resources so that park staff can make good science-based management decisions. The National Seashore now has over 50 research projects underway.

“Since its dedication,” Jarvis said, “this learning center has been a model for five more NPS learning centers in other ecosystems around the nation.”



“The Natural Resource Challenge is a major force in the NPS today,” said Point Reyes Superintendent Don Neubacher, “It is a national initiative to build and understand the natural systems within and around the parks.”

Visiting scientists, students, and NPS scientists are exploring projects at Point Reyes as diverse as monitoring coho salmon and steelhead trout, recording the San Andreas Fault, measuring the nesting success of the northern spotted owl, assessing archeological sites, writing an environmental history, and identifying and inventorying every species of life found in Tomales Bay.

The degree to which these projects are successful depends on the degree to which people can understand and connect to the resources in their national parks. With this in mind, Point Reyes educational and resource staff, as part of the Pacific Coast Learning Center program, have created a series of educational guides for middle school teachers who demanded more sophisticated science information to integrate into their lesson plans. Funded by a grant from the National Park Foundation, seven curriculum guides based on the national and state science standards were designed to facilitate a hands-on learning experience using science with the environment to culminate in a stewardship project. Each guide is easily adaptable as new scientific information becomes available and each guide includes an evaluation component to help assess a performance-based education goal. These guides, developed with direct teacher input and testing, are now being used in teacher training seminars and for ranger and docent-led programs.

“This learning center represents a step in the future for us,” Neubacher added. “We want to stretch our intellects and discover opportunity, educational enlightenment, as well as find new species and preserve the cultural and natural richness of what we have in this park.”

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